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ABSTRACT

The Assistant Secretary for Education discusses in this speech what the Federal Government, under the auspices of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, has done and is doing to meet the special educational needs of American Indians in the United States. The Office of Education has been given broad new authority and commands by the Congress and the Administration to help meet the needs of Indian children, both on and off the reservation. Grants for needs assessment and planning in the areas of education and community college opportunities for Indians are expected to be funded in 1973. Among the major educational target areas for this year are preschool programs, bicultural education, English language communication, and skill school equivalency training for adults. (FF)

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INDIAN EDUCATION AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT*

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It has been 118 years since General Isaac Stevens, Governor of the newly created Washington Territory, convened the first of a series of conferences with the Indians of the Puget Sound tribes to relay his Government's offer to purchase most of the Indian lands. He told the assembled Indians what the Great White Father had decided was good for them. He spoke of the money the Government would give for their lands, of the schools and workshops that would be built for them. The Indian response was given in a moving oration by the great Chief Seattle, spokesman for the tribes, who counseled acceptance of the inevitable and concluded with these words:

> My people will ponder the white chief's offer to buy their lands; when they have decided an answer will be given. If they agree to sell, their hearts will grieve over abandoning places sacred to dead ancestors and friends. Here and there, in every part of the whole country, the bodies and relics of the dead have been laid to remain throughout eternity. Every hillside, every valley and grove is hallowed by cherished memories of incidents in happier times. Rocks that lie dumb as they are warmed by heat of the sun, hold stories of festivals and kindly greetings when my people were merry and there was no whiskey to madden them.

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*Before the Fourth Annual Indian Education Conference, Olympic Hotel, Seattle, Washington, Friday, November 3, 1972.

> Dust under our feet responds more lovingly to the tread of Indians than to strangers because it is ashes of our ancestors and our bare feet are conscious of the sympathetic touch. At night, when the streets of cities the white mer will build are quiet, they will be thronged with returning hosts that have lived in and still love this good land. White men must deal kindly with my people, for the dead are still children of the Great King who reigns forever in heaven, and avenges wicked afflictions of His creatures upon the earth. Spirits numberless as the stars ever on watch around habitations of the living execute His will.

In obedience to the general theme of this conference, "Unity Through Communication," I come before you today as a communicator hoping to shed at least a little light on what we are doing and hope to do in my corner of the Federal Government --- the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare --- to abet the legitimate --- and outrageously ignored --- educational aspirations of Native Americans, and perhaps to respond, after so long a delay, to Chief Seattle's call for a just treatment of his people. The assignment recalls to mind another Indian response to another offer of the white man, one that was made, however, much earlier in our history, in colonial times, in fact.

It seems the Commissioners of the formidable chunk of the Eastern seaboard known as Colonial Virginia had invited the chiefs of the Six Nations to send six of their young men to college in Williamsburg.

The chiefs were not all that enthusiastic about the offer and explained their reluctance as follows:

> Several of our young people were formerly brought up at the colleges of the Northern provinces; they were instructed in all your science; but when they came back to us, they were bad runners; ignorant of every means of living in the woods; unable to bear either cold or hunger; knew neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, or kill an enemy; spoke our language imperfectly; were therefore neither fit for hunters, warriors, or counselors; they were totally good for nothing.
>
> We are, however, not the less obliged by your kind offer, though we decline accepting it. And to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of <u>their</u> sons, we will take great care of their education, instruct them in all we know, and make men of them.

The Indian chiefs obviously were not grateful for the Virginians' well intentioned but patronizing proposition, whatever their diplomatic language. Nor have their descendants had much reason to applaud the white man's ideas for Indian education throughout the subsequent years, well intentioned though they might have been. Reflecting on the uneven and often misguided ministrations, I would say it was, on the whole, rather an incredibly bad job. As a white school teacher and administrator, I do not point at any one segment of government ---

Federal, State, or local --- in noting our failure. I echo the chiefs of the Six Nations in colonial Virginia in stating the simple fact that the system has not worked. While the expectations of the Indian community may no longer call for our system to produce students who can bear cold and hunger, take deer and kill an enemy, our performance in modern times falls equally short of what Indian families should expect from Indian schools.

More than two centuries have passed since the chiefs' polite rebuke so eloquently expressed the depth of their disillusionment with the formal education of the day. I do not know, as I say, whether the Virginians truly listened to what the chiefs were saying, but I do know that similar indictments of conventional schemes for the first Americans seemed for many years to continue to fall on deaf white ears.

Evidence of this chronic failure to listen is amply documented in almost any recent study of Indian education. They are largely composed of depressing graphs and statistics concerning dropout rates, underachievement, and occupational unpreparedness, and thus take their place with similarly accusatory exposés of American education's record of failure with regard to all our minority populations. So I am not criticizing any segment of the system in particular, nor am I speaking of reservation schools. I am speaking of all Indian education, including the work of the public schools serving two-thirds of Indian children. These studies tell essentially of formal education's general inability to respond to the special

needs of the diverse peoples who comprise the American Indian population. In sum, the apparent indifference of society at large over the years, and educational policy makers in particular, with regard to what Indians have been trying to tell them for the last 200 years is at the heart of what is, indeed, a national tragedy.

Having said that, I would like to observe --- and I think many of you will agree --- that our chances for improving the sorry record of Indian education have improved remarkably in recent years.

Increasing numbers of people, especially young people, of course, but also key Federal policymakers on both sides of the political fence up to and most certainly including the President, are now listening to what Indians have been saying for so long. The national conscience has been pricked and, at least in educational matters, communications are starting to flow both ways --- an event of fundamental importance in so far as improving educational services for Indian people is concerned. My optimism in this matter stems from my own experiences over the past two years as Commissioner of Education. I arrived in Washington convinced that the success of American education depended on our ability as a Nation to provide high-quality, relevant instruction to every American citizen, not only those who by accident, birth, or circumstance would make it anyway. I was equally convinced that Federal aid, not only in dollars, but moral commitment, would become increasingly important to the achievement of this goal for all people.

As you probably know, the Office of Education today administers well over 100 programs, most of which have sprung from the legislative hopper during the last decade. To be blunt, I felt that even though this welter of programs touched on virtually every aspect of education from early childhood to graduate school and adult programs, the cumulative effect was less than impressive. The programs were not having a sufficiently significant impact on the education of the target populations, consistent with the urgency of the problems, the intent of Congress, and the substantial level of Federal treasure invested.

Thus, one of my first efforts as Commissioner was to sharpen the focus of OE's many program efforts by creating an operational planning system to identify and define overriding educational priorities that desperately needed support from all program areas. Some call this management by objectives. We put the system in place in early 1971. Some of our continuing priorities are possibly familiar to you, particularly our No. 1 goal, career education, directed at guaranteeing that all students receive training sufficient to qualify them for productive occupations at whatever point they leave the system, whether they ultimately aspire to be a skilled mechanic or a skilled surgeon. Another priority is the Right to Read, the drive begun by my predecessor, the late Jim Allen, to make sure that by the end of this decade nearly every young American reaching adulthood will have basic reading skills.

I might add that there are about 18 million Americans who are functionally illiterate, so you can see the size of the problem.

Let me explain briefly how our planning system has been put to work on behalf of Indian education.

Shortly after assuming the job of Commissioner, I talked the situation over with Helen Scheirbeck, Director of the Office of American Indian Affairs, (Helen is a Lumbee --- some of our Indian advisors call the Lumbee the Ivy League tribe.), and Dick Hays, Assistant Commissioner for special concerns. They told me that despite the fact that considerable OE funds were being spent on Indian education, there seemed no question that this money was not being spent in the most effective possible ways, and that there clearly was required a major new conception and emphasis on truly reaching Indian children. Additionally, the information I have gotten from Indian organizations and individuals indicated a wide margin for improvement, especially in the traditional OE programs that simply have not been getting to the children. One of our major concerns was to make certain that Indians were given an appropriately strong voice in the making of policy in the Office of Education in order to avoid future mistakes of the same kind. Incidentally, that <u>is</u> the role of the Office of Special Concerns --- to be a strong, consistent, nonbureaucratic advocate for Indians, Afro-Americans, Spanish-speaking Americans, and students and youth of all cutures.

To begin with, we appointed an Indian Education Task Force to take a hard look at the effectiveness of the OE activities relating to Indians, and at the future disposition of both existing programs and newly emerging legislative authority. You should know in this connection that the Task Force recommendations concerning charges that Title I funds for disadvantaged students and Federal impact aid money were not adequately serving Indian children were taken as serious issues for corrective action well before completion of the report. There had been a memorandum of understanding, dated April 28, 1971, between myself and Commissioner Bruce of the Bureau of Indian Affairs having to do with the use of Title I funds. Site visits were begun by Title I staff from my office and officials up and down the line were alerted to report all unlawful or inadequate activities.

I wish I could report today that all abuses in the administration of these programs have been corrected, but unfortunately Commissioners of Education are not issued magic wands with their desk calendars. We still have a number of problems on our hands, though I can say that these remaining difficulties are taken very seriously by the staffs of both BIA and OE, and, moreover, that we expect that the situation will be resolved satisfactorily during the coming year.

I can report happier results regarding implementation of another Task Force recommendation --- that the attention of all OE program managers be focused on Indian education by elevating it to priority

status within our Operational Planning system, the management by objectives system I mentioned earlier. This has been done. In essence, it means that I have asked all program officials to look at their particular activity --- whether it be education of the handicapped, provision of library resources, student aid, bilinqual education, work-study, community colleges, career education, or whatever --- with a special view toward the assistance their program can systematically deliver to enhance Indian education.

I have asked William Demmert, a Tlinquit from Southeastern Alaska who is a special assistant for Indian education, to put this material together and present OE projections to my office for examination as to their relevance to Indian people. I am certain that this process well help us to improve our record of program support for Indian education through much tighter monitoring and technical assistance to States and to local school systems.

With regard to that record of assistance, let me say that OE expenditures for Indian education during FY '71 and '72 totaled more than $160 million. By any standard, this is not insignificant. Some mention of how this money has been spent is in order since I believe it helps make the point that like our friends in the auto industry, we in OE are listening better. Yesterday, I was privileged to go to Neah Bay --- as far northwest as you can go in this State --- to see how the Makah Nation put funds from the Education Professions Development Act's Urban Rural School Development Program to work revitalizing their local public school. The project started in the

summer of 1971 and has engaged the entire community and school staff. Through the leadership of a 30-member School Community Council and a Team Development Manager responsible for coordinating the program, they have assessed local needs, examined and selected from alternative approaches to instruction and appropriate educational materials and practice. Where two years ago there was no Makah on the staff, there are now six Makah teacher trainees and six Makah aides. Indian culture classes are in operation with senior citizens teaching the language and related culture classes. Teacher Corps interns work with the Urban Rural trainees in a series of research and service activities. This quarter's plan requires the Makah teacher trainees to devise a training model for themselves which relates directly to their community. Thus, the entire Neah Bay School staff is involved in redesigning their program, and it's turning education around in that town. A high drop-out rate has been dramatically reduced, and a small rural school is being transformed into a model of modern educational practice. Indian education is being returned to Indians.

The degree of Indian educational involvement being practiced by the Makahs at Neah Bay was commonplace among western Cherokees during the 1880's. Their tribal educational systems worked well enough to produce a 90 percent literacy rate among Cherokees in their own language --- higher than the U.S.A. altogether in 1972 --- as well as a higher literacy level in English than could be found among whites

in either nearby Texas or Arkansas at the time, 90 years ago. The schools were closed by the Government, however, with predictably disasterous results. Today, OE is seeking to reactivate the Cherokee adult community in the education of their children as paraprofessionals under a $125,000 EPDA grant to the Tulsa Public Schools. One hundred Cherokee housewives, artists, and craftsmen are being recruited for the project. We are trying to play catch-up ball.

It is unusual to see urban schools extend their resources to their suburban or rural neighbors, but that is what is happening in Tulsa, where Indian paraprofessionals are being trained to work in eight rural schools as well as three city schools. Also, the project provides a clear indication of the importance of bilingual education. In this project a number of children that had been typed as retarded have turned out to be perfectly normal --- and teachable --- when tested in the Cherokee language.

Elsewhere, bilingual projects supported under Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act are helping Choctaws and Navahos prepare their own learning materials in a number of subjects. The Ute, Crow, and Northern Cheyenne peoples are using Title VII bilingual funds to put their own languages in written form for the first time. (You see, there <u>is</u> some good news!)

Last year, the Bureau of Libraries and Learning Resources contracted with the National Indian Education Association to develop demonstration projects aimed at meeting the specific informational

needs of Indians living on the Navaho Reservation in Arizona, the St. Regis Mohawk Reservation in New York, and the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota. I understand this research has been completed, that both the resources and delivery mechanisms required by the target communities have been identified, and that implementation will in all likelihood begin this year. Library staff tell me they are considering the possiblity of launching an Indian-operated urban demonstration project, possibly here in the Pacific Northwest this year.

In pursuit of improved educational opportunities for Indian adults, tribal councils and other Indian organizations are working with OE's Adult Education Division to attack illiteracy on the vast Navaho Reservation, to put adult learning centers into operation for the tribes of eastern Oklahoma, and provide leadership training for tribal council members and Education Commission members of Northwest Area Indian tribes. A Statewide family education system administered by the Minnesota Department of Education and devised by your own president, Will Antell, is now in its final year. Our purpose is to enable Indian citizens to seek solutions to adult education problems identified by Indians themselves --- not by Washington.

Under the Right to Read program, grants totaling $210,000 have been awarded to sponsor six community-based reading projects serving various Indian groups in as many States.

Funds authorized for our environmental education program are being used by Native Alaskans in Dillingham, Navahos in Ramah, New Mexico, at the Rough Rock Demonstration School, and by the United Tribes of North Dakota to mount Indian-oriented environmental projects. Who more than the First Americans could speak for our environment, or have greater reason to preserve it?

We convened a meeting in OE this month between representatives of the nine Indian-controlled institutions of higher education and OE staff from the Bureau of Higher Education and the Office of American Indian Affairs. Out of this gathering an American Indian Higher Education Consortium has been formed to link existing schools more closely and serve as a planning and resource center to help other Indian colleges get started. I understand that negotiations concerning OE support for the consortium through the Bureau of Higher Education are going on at this moment, and I'm not supposed to talk about specific dollar amounts. I met earlier this fall with Indian community college leaders to learn more of their needs and hopes and find ways for OE to be more responsive to this tremendously important segment of our educational system.

I cite these projects to give you a broad-brush picture of the range of Indian education activities that OE is supporting. More importantly, I mention them because they are all uniform in one respect: each enables Indians <u>themselves</u> to design the approach to a given educational problem such as illiteracy or bilingual education,

postsecondary needs, career education, early childhood programs, or whatever. When I noted earlier that we had placed Indian education in our priority system, it meant just that. All parts of OE are mandated to respond creatively --- and they have.

A serious flaw in the program of Federal aid for Indian education is its failure to reach effectively the growing numbers of Indian youngsters living away from either the reservation itself or from a nonreservation area of concentrated Indian population served by public schools. About 40 percent of all Indians as you know live in urban areas of the United States, and perhaps as much as 75 percent of the country's 270,000 Indian children attend the public schools of local education districts. Not many of these children, much less their parents, are served by the special targeted programs I have mentioned here today. Although our research on these non-reservation Indian children is not complete, it appears that they indeed have special educational problems even more complex than those of the public school Indian children in concentrated Indian population centers.

As you are aware, the Office of Education has been given broad new authority and commands by the Congress and the Administration to help meet the needs of these children, both on and off the reservation. I am speaking of the various measures included in the Education Amendments of 1972 under the general title of the Indian Education Act. This legislation provides new authority as well as amendments to existing law to give my office broader ability to funnel assistance

directly to local school districts to meet the special needs of Indian pupils enrolled there.

The Act also authorized grants from OE to the States, school districts, Federally supported schools, and --- most important --- to Indian tribes, organizations, and institutions to mount projects demonstrating improved educational opportunity for Indian children and adults. Without a doubt, there is now, for the first time, a clearly established power base in the field of education for direct and specific support of Indian education --- by Indians. There is no other education law remotely approaching this law in its degree of focus. Most of our laws are scattershot. This one is a rifle.

The Amendments have created the Office of Indian Education in OE to administer the new programs. The office will be headed by a Deputy Commissioner who will be nominated from a list submitted by the 15-member National Advisory Council on Indian Education, also created by the new law.

The Council will have a vital continuing role in the development of Indian education programs within the Office of Education and, for that matter, throughout the Federal Government. The Council will advise the Commissioner of any Federal educational programs related to Indians, review all proposals submitted to OE under the Indian Education Act, and report to the President and the Congress once a year on the status of these activities.

Congress, as you know, has funded the Indian Education Act at $18 million for FY '73, enabling us to launch many new programs. We see the bulk of the first year funds being directed to the planning and organization of improved service to Indians. We expect a high percentage of first-year grants to be awarded for needs assessment and planning, with operational grants to follow in fiscal '74, especially in career education categories and community college opportunities for Indians.

Major target areas for this year could include community-run preschool programs for children aged 9 months to 4 years and involving Indian mothers as staff members, bicultural education, English language communication, skill school equivalency training for adults, including direct grants to independently run and controlled Indian schools. Further, we will continue to press our opportunities to provide grants and aid to Indians in colleges and universities.

Additional work in my office now current focuses on the new Act by putting together recommendations to the White House for Presidential appointments to the National Advisory Council on Indian Education. Some 500 Indian tribes and other organizational groups have been asked by mail to submit their choice of nominees. We have received approximately 150 names for consideration, allowing for many duplicates. I am glad to report that my office has completed its work on these nominations and the names have gone forward for final action by the President. Indian organizations have assisted us in defining the

criteria for selection, and will be involved in reviewing all regulations, guidelines, and program priorities to be carried out under this new law. Indians, exclusively, were in charge of our selection process for the Council nominees. By early next year we hope to have both the Council and the Office of Indian Education in place to react to all new powers so that the new laws of Indian education can get underway in earnest.

I said at the opening of these remarks that the capacity of the established education authorities to listen to and to understand the needs and desires of the Indian people has been of dubious worth. And I added, with conviction, that I feel that bureaucratic deafness has been cured: We <u>are</u> listening to you who speak Indian in its many mystic and beautiful tongues. That is why I am here today --- with the members of our staff. That is why I visited Neah Bay yesterday, and will go to Fort Lawton this afternoon and the Quinault Reservation in Taholah tomorrow. I expect to spend much more time at these places listening than speaking, and it behooves me now to stop speaking and to begin to listen.

My point is this: we in the educational establishment are learning from you. And we are anxious to work with you for a better day not only for Indian education, but for all of education. Surely our success as educators, whatever our ethnic differences, will be measured by the ways in which we serve all children in America.

This is an old Indian expression, I am told: it says that you cannot judge a man "until you have walked a moon in his moccasins." As a Washington leader in education, I am trying hard to walk in your moccasins. I have good counsel as I walk, from respected companions such as Will Antell and others in the National Indian Education Association; such as Helen Scheirbeck, Bill Demmert, Purwell Swett, and others in my office in Washington, and from strong people in our regional operations such as Clarrisey Smith who does such valuable work in Indian education under Bill McLaughlin, the Commissioner here in Region X.

Finally, I hope that you will take time, now and then, to walk in my moccasins. I would ask that you understand my convictions about the justice of your cause, to set aside suspicion so long justified, and to join in my certain faith that your cause will be justified, in our time, and with Indians managing the education of Indians.

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